CRYPTOZOOLOGY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1, No. 1 April 1994
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$2.00

NEW SPECIES OF THE MONTH: THE FROG THAT CALLS UNDERWATER

Biologist James E. Platz of Creighton University has recently described a unique American amphibian: Rana subaquavocalis, the **only frog known to vocalize underwater.**

Platz discovered this peculiar creature, a type of leopard frog, in southeastern Arizona. The holotype was collected May 24, 1990, from Ramsey Canyon in Cochise County. The new species is largely olive-colored with brown spots and measures up to 116mm from snout to vent. It differs only slightly in appearance from other leopard frogs. What really sets it apart is its "snore-like" mating call, voiced only when the male frog is one meter or more under water. A few other species have occasionally been reported to call underwater, but only R. subaquavocalis does so exclusively. This offers some interesting advantages to the species. For one thing, it's safer: frogs who vocalize in air may find predators homing in on their calls. Perhaps more importantly, this gives the frog a private communications channel. Females know that any calls heard underwater will be from their own species, and the males don't have to compete with rival species to make their voices heard.

The species' population appears to number barely more than a hundred adults, scattered along two streams in a very restricted range.

Source: Platz in Journal of Herpetology, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1993.
Thanks to Prof. Platz for providing his article.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...THE MISSING BIG CATS

All the species known popularly as "big cats" are in trouble. Tigers, especially, are declining worldwide at a frightening rate. Our children may know them only as zoo specimens.

How many big cats have we actually lost? No species have vanished, but at least two lion subspecies are known to be extinct. North America's Eastern cougar was officially wiped out before the middle of this century. Three subspecies of tiger, the Bali, Javan, and Caspian, are widely considered extinct.

MISSING BIG CATS (Continued):

Could at least some of those "extinct" designations be premature? Might some cats still pull off a reappearance, the way the supposedly lost **Sinai leopard** (P. p. jarvisi) did in 1975?

The Eastern cougar (Felis concolor cougar) is the most problematical. This subspecies was exterminated as a matter of government policy, and a cat trapped on the Maine-Canada border in 1948 may have been the last of its kind. Many references give even earlier dates for the Eastern cougar's extinction.

In 1958, however, a New Jersey biologist identified a cougar in his car's headlights. A cougar of uncertain origin was killed in Tennessee in 1971. Cougar sign found in 1981 convinced biologist Robert Downing, author of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's cougar recovery plan, that the cat survived in the Virginia-West Virginia area and possibly in North Carolina. Wildlife authorities in New Brunswick, Canada, confirmed that hair, tracks, and droppings discovered in that province in 1992 came from an adult male cougar. While many cougar sightings concern dogs, bobcats, or released exotic pets, the sheer volume remains impressive. A private effort, the Eastern Puma Research Network, logged 435 sightings in 1993. Just over half of these came from Pennsylvania.

Turning to the tigers, let's review the status of the three "extinct" subspecies.

The light-colored **Bali tiger** (Panthera tigris balica) apparently vanished around 1937. Since then, there have been only a few unconfirmed reports of survivors. Fresh clawmarks found on trees in 1979 gave rise to a glimmer of hope, but no more than that.

Twenty years ago, the thin-striped, dark red **Javan tiger** (P. t. sondaica) had a population estimated at five individuals. Debate over captive breeding continued until there was apparently nothing left to breed, and the IUCN sadly wrote the subspecies off in 1984. The possibility of survival was again raised by clawmarks, these being found on a tree in the Meru Betiri reserve in 1990. Fresh tracks were found in 1992, and the Jakarta Times reported a tiger was photographed that same year. A camera trap survey was begun in 1993, but no positive results have been reported.

The larger **Caspian tiger** (P. t. virgata), which once ranged over western and central Asia, is also considered extinct. Writing in 1986, however, Bulgarian zoologist Nikolai Spassov reported that hunters in Azerbaijan insist the cat is still in existence. Other reports indicate that a handful of tigers may linger in the mountains of Afghanistan.

MISSING BIG CATS (Continued):

A few surviving individuals may not make up a viable population, but there is some chance provided immediate measures are taken to capture and breed any survivors. **The European bison (Bison bonasus), after all, was successfully reconstructed from only six animals.** We have a duty to investigate and act on any possibility of recovering these magnificent creatures.

Sources: BBC Wildlife, February 1980: "Eastern Cougar Recovery Plan," 1982: Cryptozoology, Vol. 5, 1986: Cat News, IUCN, #18, 19, 1993: Cat Tales, International Society for Endangered Cats, Summer 1993: 1993 Statistical Review, Eastern Puma Research Network, 1994.

UNCLASSIFIED: THE GIANT OCTOPUS

In a 1991 article, French cryptozoologist Michel Raynal collected the evidence for **an unidentified and colossal cephalopod.** To earlier reports, he has added interesting additional data, such as a 1500 AD report of a "monster" that plucked one of Columbus' men off a beach and a survey of the full geographical range of sightings. According to Raynal, Octopus giganteus has been reported from Cuban, Floridian, Bahamian, and Bermudan waters.

The most famous specimen, the **Saint Augustine carcass of 1896,** remains the only example documented by photographs and tissue samples. Contemporary authority A. E. Verrill initially agreed with discoverer DeWitt Webb that the Saint Augustine monster was a cephalopod, and it was Verrill who proposed its scientific name. He later changed his mind, concluding the thing was part of a dead whale. Verrill did not see the carcass, only samples, and he lacked modern biochemical analysis techniques. Such tests have been applied to specimens dug out of the Smithsonian's vaults and support an octopus identity. Verrill's articles on the subject did fail to address the "whale's" lack of bones, teeth, or baleen.

This case offers an interesting study in contrasts. Among the very large unidentified animals whose existence is alleged by cryptozoologists, the giant octopus seems the most absurd: an outsized refugee from a Godzilla movie, impossible to accept as a real animal. At the same time, it is the only such animal whose existence is supported by hard evidence.

Skepticism is understandable when anyone suggests that the world's biggest invertebrate is still at large. Despite its size (estimated at 60 to 200 feet across the tentacles), advocates can argue the dearth of specimens is also understandable. Such a creature must be at the very top of the food chain, constantly scouring the seafloor for sharks, smaller cephalopods, and the occasional scuba diver. No ecosystem could support many of them.

GIANT OCTOPUS (Continued):

A very rare animal is likely to remain a mystery, with specimens turning up only in freak circumstances. Witness the **Tasmanian beaked whale**, known from two skulls found thousands of miles apart and possibly never seen alive. If it's too much to ask textbook writers to accept Octopus giganteus in full, it is at least reasonable to mark the case file "open."

Sources:
Raynal, Michel. 1991. "Le 'Monstre de Floride' de 1896: Cetace Ou Poulpe Colossal?" Bulletin de la Soceite neuchateloise, No. 114.
Mackal, Roy. "Biochemical Analyses of Preserved Octopus giganteus tissue," Cryptozoology, Vol. 5.
Thanks to Michel Raynal for article and Jane Bille for translation.

NEWS AND NOTES

Those following **the search for new species** have enjoyed the last two years. The most startling discovery is the **Vu Quang oryx**, the first large land mammal found in at least five years (this time span depends on what authority you reference: I'm considering a muntjac deer identified in China in 1988 as the last such find.) The cuddly Rio Maues marmoset, one of three new primates described from Brazil in the last decade, also garnered some headlines.

Lesser-known but interesting examples abound. There was Lamprogrammus shcherbachevi, a slender, eel-tailed fish six feet long, described from specimens collected in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans. There was the Hainan leaf-warbler, a new bird from Hainan Island, China. It was joined by a new francolin found by Danish ornithologists in Tanzania's Udzungwa Mountains.

Recent rediscoveries of "extinct" species include the gold-ringed tanager, identified in Columbia for the first time since 1946. Other rediscovered birds include the Cebu flowerpecker, missing for eight decades, and Laos' giant ibis, lost for 30 years. The Anjouan scops owl, missing since 1886, was rediscovered in the Comoros. For herpetologists, the "extinct' snake Chironius vincenti turned up on St. Vincent. Finally, the Palos Verdes blue butterfly, "wiped out" in 1983, just resurfaced near Los Angeles.

Those are only a few of the latest additions to the world's fauna. Sadly, there is also a deletion: **the ivory-billed woodpecker**, so recently rediscovered in Cuba, was returned to "extinct" status after a 1993 survey failed to find a single bird.

References: Various newspapers and magazines on oryx and marmoset. Other notes from Oryx, Vol. 27, Nos. 1-4, except Lamprogrammus, for which see Cohen & Rohr in Copeia, 1993(2), p.470, and butterfly, CNN report, April 5, 1994.

RESOURCES:

BOOKS.

Shuker, Karl P. N. 1993. **The Lost Ark: New and Rediscovered Animals of the Twentieth Century.** London: HarperCollins.
Zoologist Shuker has written the most valuable crytozoological book in years. Not every animal discovered in this century could be included, but most of the vertebrates and a sample of the invertebrates are here. This is not a survey of "cryptids" (there is, for instance, no Loch Ness entry), but some still-unclassified animals, like a huge freshwater fish reported from China, made the cut. Sources are given in all cases. A superb contribution.

RECENT PERIODICALS.

Monaghan, Peter. 1993. **"Cryptozoologists Defy Other Scientists' Skepticism to Stalk Beasts Found in Legend, Art, and History,"** The Chronicle of Higher Education, February 10.
Skeptical but sympathetic overview of the efforts to put cryptozoology on a scientific basis.

Park, Penny. 1993. **"Beast from the deep puzzles zoologists,"** New Scientist, January 23.
Reports of large unknown sea creatures off Canada, with photo of an unidentified animal found in a sperm whale's stomach.

Weintraub, Boris. 1994. **"Oregon Fights to Save a Rediscovered Butterfly,"** National Geographic, April.
Status of Fender's blue butterfly, which vanished in 1931 and was rediscovered in 1989.

Anonymous. 1994. **"Snapshots,"** U.S. News & World Report, March 28.
Frustratingly brief report of claim the 1934 Wilson photograph of the Loch Ness monster was a hoax using a toy submarine.

IN CLOSING: I hope you've enjoyed the first issue. Please direct comments, brickbats, and responses to the editor at 802 Williamsburg Dr., Kokomo, IN 46902.
Readers interested in learning more about new and unknown animals should join the International Society of Cryptozoology, which produces the quarterly ISC Newsletter and the scientific journal Cryptozoology. Contact J. Richard Greenwell, Secretary, ISC, P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733.

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